



Gender Partnerships needed

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Worldwide, men seem to miss in most gender and development policies. With a few notable exceptions, men are rarely explicitly mentioned in gender policy documents. Where men are considered they are generally seen as obstacles to women's development. There has been push for men to change in order to benefit women, men to take on a greater burden of domestic work that has been on women, to cede their places on committees and public bodies to women.

Since the time when issues of gender came into focus, a lot has been done to ensure that women are given recognition in the development processes. Some of the approaches had been extremists such as the feminism that portrayed men as villains while women as innocent victims. The moderate ones such as women in development (WID) to gender and development (GAD) has reluctantly represented a shift in recognizing the need to analyse social relationships between women and men and to be more aware of factors such as class, age and policies that affect the relationships and development processes. Despite this shift in emphasis, the development policy and processes show little recognition of the need to analyse and understand the lives of men as well as women.

Approaches that strive for gender equality and social justice avoid seeing the more effective delivery of development as they fail to recognize that men as well as women may be disadvantaged by social and economic structures and that all have the right to a life free from poverty and oppression. The objective of gender policies should be to promote human dignity through overcoming pressures on both men and women. Through empowering both men and women, there will be liberation from the confines of stereotyping, resulting in beneficial outcomes for both genders.

To achieve social justice and empowerment of humanity strategic gender partnerships need to be made. Men are needed to ensure that they do not become obstacles to development, because they can provide access to valuable resources and because through solidarity and co operation, more can be achieved for both sexes. Men are needed as partners in responsibility for the family and the raising of children. This includes their role in joint decision making in issues such as child health, they are also needed as partners in political movements and major institutions to ensure gender issues are not marginalized.

Development agencies and most governments within the third world have continued to put their main development and empowerment focus on women and the girl-child while excluding men and the boy-child. Most of the interventions carried out either focus on girl child education or improving the economic status of the women. This is despite the fact that man is still considered as the head of the family, house hold and custodians of cultural values in the society. Many gender programs have not come out seek to ensure that men and women clearly understand and appreciate the fact that their women or girls can be empowered to take over or to support their role for the benefit of the family and community as a whole. Men have not fully accepted the programs that tend to challenge their positions since they do not understand them or excluded in their processes. In most African societies its men who either perpetrate or support most acts of violence against their fellow men or women. Although men have been seen as the villains, among those communities that practice F.G.M, its old women who carry out the practice and men are encouraged not to marry women who have undergone it. Because family life and marriage is highly up held in such societies women willingly or encourage others to go for it so that as to get husbands and bring up families. For reduction of these kind of harmful traditional practices men should be targeted to change their attitude as opposed to women. As the custodians of the cultural beliefs if the young men can be made to shun and do away with them, women will be safer because most of them work to their disadvantage.

In societies that practice widow inheritance, if a husband dies the widow is supposed to be inherited by her brother- in- law or cousins whether the she loves the man or not. This not only hurts the widow and the children but also poses health danger to both the man and woman considering the HIV/AIDS scourge that has a ripple effect as both parties might die leaving behind orphans who might form child headed households which depend on the larger community for their survival or turn to crime and other social evils such as prostitution and theft to fend themselves.

In the analysis of the hours taken by gender to undertake the productive work, based on 24 hour clock schedule it emerges that many women work up to 18 hours, while majority of men work for about six (6) hours. This indicates that women are carrying unfair load of the development burden. As women are generally occupied from dawn to dusk, this has caused feminisation of poverty since women try too hard to reduce it while the men sit back and watch.

In most third world countries there are several women groups both in the urban slums and rural society who carry out table banking and other income generating activities to uplift their economic status so as to fend for their families. It has been coming clearer that men's contribution to their families' welfare is diminishing in the rural society and urban slums that needs to change for meaningful and sustainable development to be achieved. To reduce the poverty burden on women, most organisations and groups have continued to focus on women excluding men. Because of this over emphasis on women, they have become more empowered than men and in turn they have become bread winners for their families, this has led to frustration of men who have turned into alcoholics and drug abusers to escape reality thus leading to breakage of most families due to domestic and gender based violence.

Most world societies are patriarchal which explains why more men control key economic resources and are leaders in most political positions than women. On the political front women who dare compete with men are exposed to attacks and brutality. Most women are either nominated or appointed; they do not compete with men on an equal ground. Equity exists when both men and women are able to share equally distribution of power and influence. Most states should therefore provide for equal slots in key leadership positions i.e. ministerial and political in their constitutions so as to enable both sexes present and address the problems they are facing. In the present situation in most third world countries men account for 90% leadership positions, women issues are in most cases therefore left out. They emerge as a vulnerable group whose value is often remembered during elections. They are bribed to vote for their male counterparts without necessarily looking into how the candidate will aid or promote their projects. Women also need to be taken through civic education so that they are able to critically analyse and make independent decisions during elections. Men should also be taken through the same process to change their attitude towards women so that they don't view them as home makers but as equal partners in development. They would therefore vote for women in terms of their capability rather than out of sympathy. The only way to get to that level is to promote both girl and boy child education to enable them gain skills so as to compete equally.

The men's role in most of the development initiatives is dismal because of the belief that men are strong and have authority and therefore can ably take care of themselves. However there is increased need to increase men's participation in development and also to increase their involvement in productive growth .Men and boys inclusion in gender transformation is a significant developmental venture that has so far been widely disregarded in the discourse of change to date.

Support for Tropical Initiatives in Poverty Alleviation (STIPA) is a national non-governmental, non-profit making organisation based in Kisumu, Kenya. The organisation encourages and support local initiatives and build he capacities of community members in order to enable them manage their development projects successfully.

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